

JUSTIN WATTERSON

ENGLISH 350: LITERARY ANALYSIS

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: *The Ephemera*

29 SEPTEMBER 1997

(A) Pd

Without argument, Benjamin Franklin was one of the truly great forefathers of the United States. He served as a key figure during the American Revolution, both at home and in Europe. He was one of the writers of our Constitution. His endeavors reached far beyond politics, however. Franklin was a man who craved knowledge and understanding, and he pursued it in everyday life. He was a writer and editor, an inventor and a scientist, a governor of New Jersey and a common sense philosopher to say the least. Most of his writings addressed political issues, and many of them were ^{also} satirical and ironic as well. I have taken more interest in the personal life of Franklin, however. For this reason, I chose to analyze *The Ephemera*. This work was actually written for one of his dearest friends in France, Madame d'Hardancourt Brillon. While it is somewhat personal, it is far from intimate ~~and~~ and was published in both French and English. In *The Ephemera*, Franklin uses a metaphorical story to demonstrate how he feels in his old age. In my analysis, I intend to draw linear similarities between Franklin's story and his actual life.

Upon reading the entire first paragraph, the reader might possibly think that Franklin is crazy and absurd. He states that he can communicate with the flies. Any knowledge of Franklin's literary personality, however, will immediately alert the reader that he is merely employing his default type of irony. The entire first paragraph sets the stage very well for the paragraph quotation that follows. Franklin has given most of his comparisons and made it evident to the reader exactly where he is headed with the work. *A dev*

The first comparison that appears from the opening paragraph is that of the company of humans with which he walks and the company of ephemerae that he "overhears." Franklin most likely repeated the word "company" in this instance so that the reader might see the connection more easily. With this same method of comparison, the garden at the Moulin Joly estate is represented by the leaf that the flies rest upon. As he listens to them, he notes that they must be content with their government and society since they have nothing better to discuss than foreign music. This should show the reader that Franklin will definitely address some type of political issue within the work at some point.

Next, Franklin describes the gray-headed fly who stands alone and speaks to himself. Obviously, this gray-headed fly symbolizes Franklin himself. Franklin's record of his speech serves as the entire paragraph that follows. This portion of the work serves as Franklin's emotional vent in a way. He uses it to exhibit his views about himself, his past life, and the state of the world. *Develop —*

HIS?

The world that the ephemerae live in lasts eighteen hours according to the old fly. The life span of the world of the flies is not the important issue; however, the fact that their world has an end just the same as it had a beginning is. Franklin uses this to remind the reader that the human world will one day end, as well. By comparing the beginning and end of our world to the rise and fall of the sun, he prevents the reader from taking our temporary world for granted.

He then begins to discuss his age and the works of his life. Though this is literally the fly speaking, it is also the precise words of Franklin himself figuratively. The fly states that it does not expect to live much longer than seven or eight minutes. Proportionally, this would mean that Franklin expects to live only a few more years. He was somewhere between seventy and eighty years old at the time this was written. The ephemera then tells how the works of his life ("amassing honey-drew") will be enjoyed by his younger companions and not by himself, since he will soon expire. This is very much what happened to Franklin. He died in 1790, so he was able to enjoy only fourteen years of independence as an American and only three years of the democratic republic that was established in part by himself.

In the next few lines, he leaves the reader with the bulk of his political commentary. He states that laws will have no effect over immorality, and that any fresh, new state will quickly become consumed by corruption. He compares this to a general trend that has occurred throughout history. The reader is meant to question realize how little Franklin believes society as a whole has learned of freedom and independence.

Concluding his speech, the fly speaks of the legacy which he will leave after death, according to his colleagues. He does not see the value of such fame after he has passed, however. Franklin does not find comfort in the fact that he will have a name that last forever. Rather, he finds discomfort that the works of his life will eventually be spoiled by society's lack of morality. He continues by recognizing that such fame will have no value when the world finally comes to an end, either. *develop*

Franklin concludes the letter by tying the two paragraphs together. He does this successfully with a single sentence, saying that he only finds pleasure in the company of his dearest friends and the common sense that he has lived by in his final years. This statement is directed primarily to Madame Brillon, who shares her music and her smile with Franklin. *develop*

Overall, this work reflects the general character of Benjamin Franklin. He is modest about his accomplishments, even as numerous as they were. Still, he despises the thought that they will be eventually ruined after he is dead and gone. While Franklin does acknowledge that he will retain fame after death, it seems as though he does not realize exactly how much recognition he will receive, even to this day. His prediction of corruption was very accurate, though it is only common sense to him that such corruption will take place. This corresponds to his idea that laws have no meaning without morals.

Franklin did, indeed, live to an old age, even by modern standards. For his time, the life expectancy was much shorter. His perception of himself as he paints it in such writings as this has become the historical perception of himself. He has been criticized for his flaws that he never wrote about, however. He was criticized as a horrible father and an adulterer for the most part. The things he discusses in *The Ephemera* focus on his achievements and the incredible role he has played in founding this nation. I believe that he has done this for a reason. While not appearing conceited at all, he has done his part to assure that he will be remembered for his achievements and not his mistakes. I think this illustrates the wit and wisdom of Benjamin Franklin to a high degree.

QUALITIES OF WELL-WRITTEN SHORT ESSAY

1. Clear, focussed/limited thesis stated in the intro. (subject + point of significance)
2. Introduction that engages reader and gets the essay started quickly.
3. Clear supporting points.
4. Clear organization overall--reader should not have to figure out why points are organized the way they are.
5. Paragraphs are
 - unified: one idea and one idea only;
 - coherent: sentences within paragraph flow logically; and
 - developed: supporting details and examples are carefully explained and shown.
6. Transitions used between paragraphs.
7. Conclusion quickly closes essay and does not restate every point made in essay.
8. Sentences are grammatically correct.
9. Punctuation is used correctly.
10. No spelling errors or typos.
11. Quotations are smoothly incorporated within the text and cited correctly (MLA).

PROBLEMS WITH YOUR ESSAY

OVERALL:	
--Thesis	<i>on</i>
--Organization	<i>need to work on organization of pts + also of how each pt is developed -</i>
--Clear supporting points	<i>not always</i>
INTRODUCTION:	
--Engages reader	<i>on</i>
--Gets the essay started quickly	<i>on</i>
--Contains the thesis	<i>on</i>
CONCLUSION:	
--Completes essay	<i>on</i>
--Avoids restating points of the essay	
PARAGRAPHS:	
--Coherence	<i>✓ need to work on P's -</i>
--Unity	
--Development	<i>✓</i>
SENTENCES:	
--Sentence construction (anything from fragments to structural problems)	
--Uses words concisely, avoiding wordiness	
GRAMMAR & PUNCTUATION:	
--Pronoun reference	
--Comma use	<i>✓ semicolons</i>
--Spelling	
--Typos	
--Word choice	
--Quotations	